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Opinions

Reduced speeds, increased safety reasons enough for cameras on 101

W. Valley should welcome cameras

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Scottsdale's experiment with photo speed enforcement on its stretch of Loop 101 proved what is for many a matter of common sense: Drivers are less likely to speed when they are more likely to get caught doing so.

According to an Arizona State University report, the nine-month Scottsdale pilot program reduced speeds from 74 to 64 mph. That, in turn, reduced collisions by as much as 70 percent.

ASU researchers arrived at their conclusions by comparing Scottsdale's photo-enforced portion of Loop 101 to a similar stretch of the freeway running through the West Valley.

The report prompted Glendale's new vice mayor, Manny Martinez, a long-time proponent of photo traffic enforcement, to argue that a similar program should be brought to the West Valley.

We agree. And it appears more likely than ever to happen now that Gov. Janet Napolitano has called for exploring a statewide photo-enforcement program.

Opponents of photo enforcement argue that it's an invasion of privacy. But that's simply not true.

Far from being an Orwellian government surveillance network, speed cameras only take photos of drivers who exceed a certain speed. In Scottsdale, that speed was set at 11 mph above the posted 65 mph speed limit.

Drivers who make a habit of driving at or near the posted speed limit needn't worry about being recorded.

Cost is a similar non-issue. Are there initial capital investment costs? Absolutely.

But public safety officers certainly aren't free. And the startup costs of photo enforcement are offset to an extent by increased revenue from traffic citations.

In the end, the most important issue is that of public safety.

Driving is a privilege, not a constitutional right. And a license to drive is by no means a license to speed.

Drivers not only have a legal obligation to obey the posted speed limit and other traffic laws; they have a moral obligation to drive as safely as possible.

Most drivers have an inflated sense of their prowess behind the wheel, which is one of the primary causes of speeding.

But the simple fact is, speeding kills. In 2005, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, more than 50 percent of fatal crashes occurred at speeds of 55 mph or greater.

Photo enforcement is now a proven tool for reducing speeds and collisions.

For that reason alone, it would be a welcome addition to West Valley freeways.